

Eau Claire Area Schools

500 Main Street
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701

To: FCC

02-6

From: Don Johnson

RE: 02-6, Elimination of Dark Fiber Lease for ERATE Funds

I want urge you to allow Dark Fiber Leasing to be eligible for ERATE funding in the future. We are heavily dependent on the lease of dark fiber to manage our wide area network in the Eau Claire Area Schools (a district of 10,500 students with 22 sites). Without this lease system we would be required to build our own fiber optic system independently OR sell our network electronics to Charter Communications and then lease the electronics and the fiber access from them at extremely higher costs OR simply double our costs and not get ERATE funds because it is not allowed.

The bottom line is that a change in this policy would cost our school district hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of time (at least \$60,000 per year), or possibly much more. This proposal would further erode our funding that has already been drastically cut from state budget reductions in technology support. Federal dollars have also been reduced.

I am sure that Charter Communications would love this proposal, as they want to manage services and charge us more for it. They have not been very happy about leasing fiber and would rather not. I would be curious if cable-network providers are lobbying to make this change. It would lead to more profits for the vendors and higher costs for the schools and libraries. This proposal will clearly increase our costs with a result of either higher taxes at the local level **OR** a deterioration of service for students.

I plead with you to help us in maintaining our ability to serve our students. With the advent of No Child Left Behind, we are continually being asked to do more with less. We continue to struggle to provide basic telecommunications and data services for children, I hope we don't take another hit.

Sincerely,

Don Johnson
Executive Director of Technology
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